

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 IO-13 /099 W
-----116929 090649Z /11

R 090625Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3623
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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ALSO FOR USOECD

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS EXPRESSES
SATISFACTION AT FIRST SIX MONTHS PERFORMANCE OF
GOVERNMENT

REF: BRUSSELS A-232

SUMMARY. AT AN UNUSUAL PRESS CONFERENCE DECEMBER 7
PRIME MINISTER LEO TINDEMANS DEFENDED THE PERFORMANCE
OF HIS GOVERNMENT IN ITS FIRST SIX MONTHS IN OFFICE.
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TINDEMANS WAS RESPONDING TO WIDESPREAD CRITICISM OF
THE RECORD OF THE SECOND TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT AND
CHARGES THAT HE HAD SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE PERSONALLY
APATHETIC IN THE FACE OF SERIOUS AND MOUNTING
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. THE EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS OF THE GOVERN-
MENT'S FIRST SIX MONTHS IS SET FORTH IN THE REFERENCED
AIRGRAM. END SUMMARY.

1. STUNG BY A ROUND OF CHARGES THAT HE RUNS A "DO NOTHING" GOVERNMENT, PRIME MINISTER LEO TINDEMANS CALLED A PRESS CONFERENCE AT HIS BRUSSELS RESIDENCE DECEMBER 7 TO DEFEND THE RECORD OF HIS GOVERNMENT, WHICH, AS OF DECEMBER 14, WILL HAVE BEEN IN OFFICE SIX MONTHS. TINDEMANS NOTED THAT, OF THOSE SIX MONTHS, TWO HAD BEEN DEVOTED TO PREPARING THE BUDGET, WHILE 12 OF HIS MINISTERS HAD BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN EXTRA DUTIES IN CONNECTION WITH THE BELGIAN EC PRESIDENCY. NEVERTHELESS, SAID TINDEMANS, HIS GOVERNMENT HAD MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ON SEVERAL FRONTS.

2. ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT, HE SAID, THE GOVERNMENT HAD GIVEN TOP PRIORITY TO EMPLOYMENT, AND HAD RESPONDED TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS BY PRESSING THE FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION, BY ADOPTING MEASURES TO STIMULATE PRIVATE INVESTMENT, BY MORE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF THE BUDGET, AND BY AN EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH LEVEL OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT. THE GOVERNMENT WAS ALSO IN THE PROCESS OF DEFINING A NEW INDUSTRIAL POLICY AS WELL AS A POLICY FOR PROMOTING SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE ENTERPRISES.

3. ON THE SOCIAL FRONT, THE PRIME MINISTER STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUED DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND LABOR AND MANAGEMENT ("THE SOCIAL PARTNERS"), AND POINTED WITH SATISFACTION TO A RECENTLY-CONCLUDED LABOR CONTRACT WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS. TINDEMANS SAID THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION DOES NOT PERMIT QUICK SOLUTION OF ALL SOCIAL PROBLEMS. HE SAID HE WAS CONCENTRATING HIS ATTENTION ON DEVELOPING A SOCIAL POLICY WHICH WOULD CUSHION THE MOST DISADVANTAGED AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF CURRENT ECONOMIC TROUBLES.

4. ON THE FLEMISH-WALLOON COMMUNITY QUESTION, THE PRIME MINISTER STRESSED THE FAR-REACHING CHANGES ENVISAGED BY THE EGMONT PACT WHICH IS DESIGNED TO CONVERT BELGIUM INTO A FEDERAL STATE (REF AIR). HE NOTED THAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH NEGOTIATED THE PACT LAST SPRING (AND ARE NOW PREPARING ITS IMPLEMENTATION) CONTROL 81 OF THE SEATS IN PARLIAMENT. HE REAFFIRMED HIS FAITH THAT THE FOUR POLITICAL "FAMILIES" WHICH MADE THAT PACT WOULD REMAIN IN THE GOVERNMENT COALITION FOR THE AGREED EIGHT YEARS AND WOULD PRODUCE, AT LONG LAST, A SETTLEMENT OF BELGIUM'S LONG-STANDING COMMUNITY ISSUE.

5. TINDEMANS BUTTRESSED HIS DEFENSE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S MAIN POLICY POSITIONS WITH SUMMARIES OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT UNDER 11 SPECIFIC HEADINGS, TOUCHING INTER ALIA UNEMPLOYMENT, DEFENSE OF THE FRANC, ANTI-INFLATION MEASURES AND BUDGET REFORM.

6. COMMENT: TINDEMANS' PRESS CONFERENCE, SCHEDULED ON SHORT NOTICE AND WITHOUT CONSULTATION WITHIN THE

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GOVERNMENT, WAS THE PRIME MINISTER'S PERSONAL RESPONSE TO MOUNTING PUBLIC CONCERN OVER THE CURRENT STAGNATION OF BELGIAN POLITICAL LIFE. CRITICISM HAS BEGUN TO FOCUS ON TINDEMANS HIMSELF, WHO IS BEING DEPICTED IN PRESS AND POLITICAL COMMENT AS IMMOBILIZED BY THE MASSIVE MAJORITY HE COMMANDS IN HIS SECOND GOVERNMENT. HIS PRESS CONFERENCE WAS, FOR HIM, AN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY PARTISAN DEFENSE OF THE RECORD, ONE THAT GLOSSED OVER A NUMBER OF SOCIAL/ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH ARE CLEARLY NOT UNDER CONTROL. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS A SOLO EFFORT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO WAS STUNG BY CHARGES THAT HE CAN'T -

OR CAN'T GET UP THE ENERGY TO TRY TO - MAKE HIS
UNWIELDY GOVERNMENT WORK.

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7. THE IMMEDIATE REACTION TO TINDEMANS' PLOY WAS
MIXED. HIS DETRACTORS - INCLUDING INFLUENTIAL VOICES
IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY (OSTENSIBLY A LOYAL PARTNER IN
HIS COALITION) - CALLED HIS BRIEF FOR THE DEFENSE BANAL
AND SUPERFICIAL. HIS SUPPORTERS PRAISED HIM FOR SPEAK-
ING UP FOR HIS GOVERNMENT, WHICH SOME APOLITICAL BELGIANS
COULD BE EXCUSED FOR FORGETTING EXISTED. WHEN THIS PUFF
OF DUST SETTLES, NEITHER TINDEMANS NOR HIS GOVERNMENT
WILL BE IN DANGER. NO ALTERNATIVE TO TINDEMANS II
IS BEING HAWKED TO BELGIAN VOTERS. AND MOST ARE FOR
THE TIME BEING CONVINCED THAT, WITH ALL ITS LIMITATIONS,
THE PRESENT BIG COALITION GOVERNMENT IS THE BEST
INSTRUMENT FOR DEALING WITH BELGIUM'S SERIOUS ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS. CHAMBERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRIME MINISTER
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 09-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BRUSSE18231
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770458-0189
Format: TEL
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771275/aaaacles.tel
Line Count: 193
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 49a92308-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 BRUSSELS A-232
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 299425
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BELGIAN PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS EXPRESSES SATISFACTION AT FIRST SIX MONTHS PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT
TAGS: PINT, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/49a92308-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009